

Social media (from previous page)

KN: You mention that you're using social networks to facilitate communication between artists – for example, Pinterest to gather images for costume and scene designs. Can you share more examples?

LW: This is perhaps the most interesting thing about social media. These networks are rapidly replacing the traditional forms of communication.

We have actors contacting us through Facebook about auditions. We are able to look on Facebook and YouTube at photos and videos of work by people we are considering hiring. Since the professional theatre community is small, we actually can see who different artists have worked with, and see if we have any common connections.

When Betsi (Morrison, Luke's wife and company co-founder) began working on our 2012 production of "Little Shop of Horrors," our costume designer was in Texas. They used Pinterest to gather images for design inspiration. We also post videos to a private channel of rehearsal with our students so they can look at certain things at their leisure.

KN: Are there surprising ways that social media has sparked conversation or fresh ideas among artists?

LW: I'm becoming more interested in using social media not for marketing, but for enhancing the stories we tell on stage. The Royal Shakespeare Company is really doing some amazing things with this. When they produced "Romeo and Juliet" a few years ago, they reenacted the entire story in real time on Twitter ... How interesting would it be if what you were watching on stage was only one part of the story? That other parts were being played out online? It's a whole new medium.

KN: I notice that you post a lively mixture of observations, local color and ATP-specific info on FB. What guides your content?

LW: I sat in on a webinar held by Guy Kawasaki, who has a massive social media presence. He advocated that companies need to earn the right to post about themselves, and that they do this by sharing other information, not about themselves, that their audience finds interesting. We are trying to adopt that strategy.

I just ask myself, "If I saw this on my feed, would I click it? Is it interesting?" In following this, we're actually finding our voice, and it's permeating into other marketing materials.

KN: Which posts seem to generate the most response?

LW: Good responses have come from all sorts of posts. We post not just about ATP, but about things that we find creative, and a lot about our community and Montana. It's a big part of who we are, and if we are going to market our arts companies to the nation at large, our location in Montana is a HUGE selling point. And people are interested in it.

I will say that video always does better than anything else.

KN: How does Twitter add to the mix?

LW: I'm still trying to figure out what to do with it ... It seems best right now for just getting things out there – announcements of any kind. I'm also finding that humor works way better.

KN: ATP uses lots of video, primarily on YouTube and Google +. How are you taking the raw footage, and how much editing is involved?

LW: I really want to do more live streaming. I think it's a great way to reach people. I also would love to do Google Hangouts (video conferences) with theatre artists and use them as online salons. That kind of stuff.

We shoot video mainly on Betsi's DSLR camera with a mounted Rode DLSR microphone. I then edit it on either iMovie or Final Cut Pro. We'll also take supplemental video with our phones. It's quick and easy. Then I'll upload it to YouTube and share it accordingly.

KN: Any idea who engages the most with ATP on social media sites? Has it enhanced your ability to reach new audiences?

LW: This one's tough. On Facebook, it's across the board – everything from high school students to octogenarians.

Twitter has been primarily 20s-30s. Mainly female. It has helped us reach new audiences only by spreading the word about who we are. But that doesn't necessarily translate into higher ticket sales. I still think it comes down to putting on shows and programs that are worth watching. Live. The greatest social media presence in the world won't help with that if your programming is stale and uninteresting.

Archie Bray Foundation, Helena

The Archie Bray has an impressive Facebook presence, with more than 6,000 likes. In 2012, the ceramic arts foundation had increased its following with more than 1,162 likes, and more than 7 million posts had been made by people sharing the Bray with friends. Communications director Rachel Hicks explains that timing and content are crucial.

KN: When did the Bray begin to get serious about social media?

RH: We joined Facebook in early 2009, which was our first step in beginning to use social media. It came about because of a big push from a board member who had been using it to help promote herself.

We have also poked around in other realms of social media with Twitter, Flickr, Pinterest, YouTube, a blog and Instagram. Though Facebook has been our main social media outlet, Instagram has become more important in just the last few months.

Archie Bray Foundation: It's important to find a balance between getting out information that we want heard, and putting out information that people want to hear. Often this involves being creative about making those two things into one.

KN: What are some of the challenges you've faced in creating a robust social media presence?

RH: One of the biggest challenges is learning to let go of control of what people are going to say and see about the organization. Another challenge is figuring out what your "followers/friends" want to hear from you and creating content that is relevant to them.

KN: You say that through experimentation, you've learned what content your audience is most interested in. What types of content do FB followers most respond to?

RH: When we first began I wasn't sure what people wanted to hear about from the Archie Bray and how much they already knew. I spent a lot of time just "listening" to what other organizations and individuals were posting.

I also started to post different content (artwork images, education info, donation requests and so on) to see what people responded to. I also watched to see when people would respond and what time of day was most successful for these things. It was time intensive but I began to see patterns of what people liked and commented on or shared.

For the Bray, I noticed that people strongly responded to artwork at all stages of production. By comparing that to the demographics that Facebook supplies I concluded that a lot of people who were interested in following the Bray were probably artists themselves and looking for inspiration ...

KN: How important is timing?

RH: The time of day is important to maximize people seeing the post. All the social media applications have different algorithms and they are always changing, but that's what controls your post getting onto people's feeds.

I noticed that if I posted in the late afternoon or early evening, there were more people seeing the post, and thus liking it and keeping it going on the news feed. If I posted too early in the morning, often the post would disappear before lunch.



The Archie Bray's Instagram page: "Another great experiment in watching and learning how long our images last on feeds and what is good content and timing."

However, if the topic we were posting about is very relevant to what is happening within a specific community it may stay around longer. For example, if a well-known artist is given an award or passes away, that information seems to be reposted and shared more often.

We have just recently started to use Instagram a lot more and this has been another great experiment in watching and learning how long our images last on feeds and what is good content and timing. Many of our resident artists are big users of Instagram so it's fun to tie into what they are doing as well.

KN: Do you have a staff person dedicated to maintaining your social media presence, or is it a more diffused role at the Bray, where posts come from several different artists or staff members?

RH: At first we had the idea that multiple people would be posting for the Bray but quickly realized that it wasn't the best thing for us. We have multiple people who are administrators on our accounts. While I am in charge of the content that goes out through social media, I do seek the input of others.

Most recently our gallery director, Emily Free Wilson, has gotten excited about posting on Instagram. We set up a schedule and talked about what we wanted to post when, and she has been having a great time doing it.

The other side of the equation for us is the resident artists. They are very active on social media. There are many times that I share photos they have posted or ask them to send them to me so I can post them on the Archie Bray account. I often share things on their pages as well or ask them to "like" something I post to keep it alive on the stream.

KN: Are there other social media outlets that are part of the mix, or that you're developing?

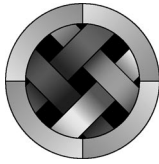
RH: As I mentioned before, we have been using Instagram a lot more lately which is great for our art community. We are part of a very visual community and Instagram is just that, a place to post great images and snippets into what is happening at the Bray.

YouTube has become the second largest search engine and I would like to start using it more.

KN: What guides your choices about how best to interact with your audience and supporters?

RH: The community itself. I strongly recommend getting to know your audience, and creating places where you can get feedback. Play around to find out what they like and do not like or respond to.

It's important to find a balance between getting out information that we want heard, and putting out information that people want to hear. Often this involves being creative about making those two things into one.



Five hot trends

"More than 70% of online adults are Facebook users, but the popular social network is facing some slivers of competition as new digital destinations entice users. In 2013 we saw the rise of visual social media, with services such as Instagram and Pinterest reeling in fans with photos-first agendas," reports Amber Mac, a best-selling author, TV host, speaker, and strategist in a story titled "Five of the Best and Worst Social Networking Trends for 2014," posted at fastcompany.com.

Her list of emerging trends includes:

1. Disappearing Media: "When their parents and grandparents jump on board of one social media site (like Facebook), teens scurry off to carve out new online territory. Most recently, Snapchat is driving the trend."

2. Better Blogging: "Finally, blogging is beautiful." She suggests a visit to the new blog-publishing platform Medium, billed by its founder, Ev Williams as "the cleanest, most streamlined writing interface on the web."

3. Private Networks: She mentions Lulu, a women-only app (iOS/Android).

4. Self-Centered Social: "Just when you thought social media couldn't get more egotistical," writes Mac, "Shots of Me makes it easy to share selfies."

5. Airbnb for Everything: NeighborGoods, DogVacay, and Airbnb "all drive home this fact: social networks are built for sharing."

– www.fastcompany.com